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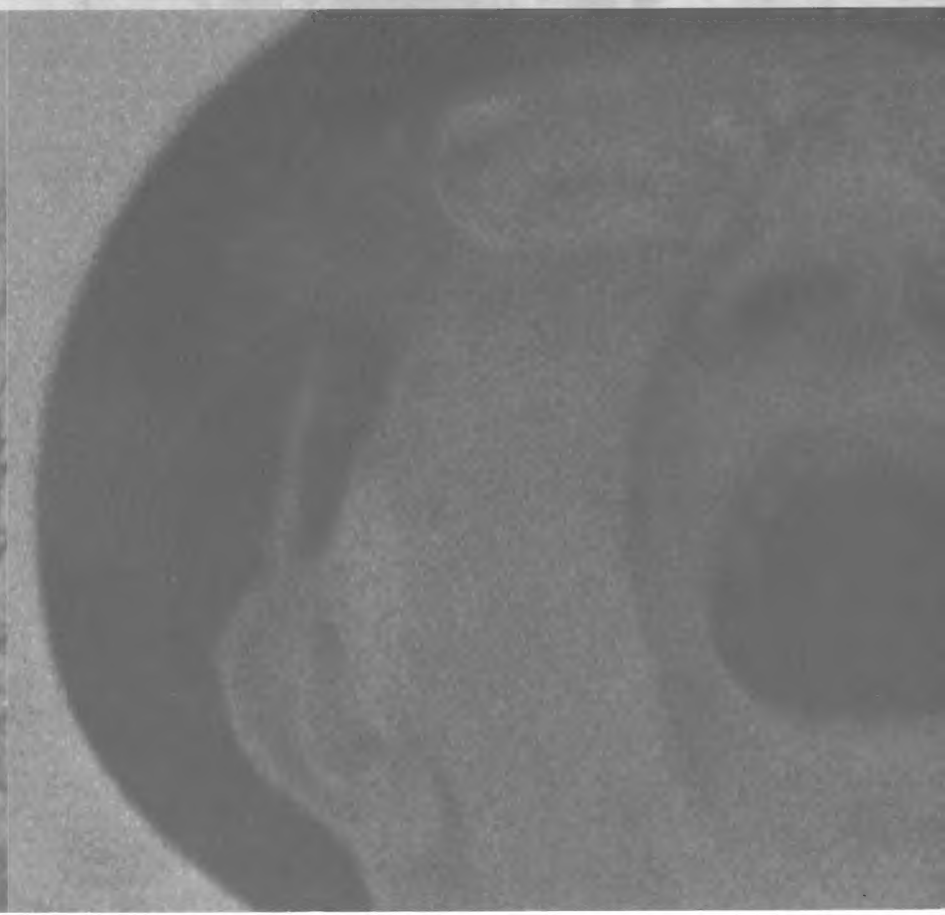

Saving the Images:

A Report from the Looking Back/Looking Forward Symposium

By Sherry Miller Hocking

The American television and video heritage is now at a crossroads. One direction leads toward catastrophic losses of film and videotape, with the likely exception of studio and network programs in corporate archives that can be recycled for new income. Another direction leads toward the managed preservation of extant television and video materials that bear an important relationship to American history and culture regardless of their reuse potential or monetary value.

from: *Television and Video Preservation 1997: A Study of the Current State of American Television and Video Preservation*

Vol 1, pg 123

On May 31st and June 1st, 2002, over 50 media arts professionals, conservators, technical experts, and artists gathered at the historic firehouse home of Downtown Community TV Center in New York for *Looking Back/Looking Forward*, a working symposium on moving image preservation, organized by the **Experimental Television Center** in association with **Independent Media Arts Preservation** (IMAP) and **Bay Area Video Coalition**. Focused on the physical preservation of independent electronic media works and related issues concerning tools and ephemera, *Looking Back/Looking Forward* facilitated an honest and sometimes disturbing evaluation of our progress as a field and informed discussion about necessary and realistic initiatives and partnerships.

Participants at the symposium included representatives of **Art and Science Laboratory** (Santa Fe), **Artists Television Access** (San Francisco), **Bay Area Video Coalition** (SF), **Electronic Music Foundation**, **Electronic Arts Intermix**, **Experimental Television Center**, **George Eastman House**, **Guggenheim Museum**, **IMAP**, **la foundation Daniel Langlois** (Montreal), **La Guardia Community College**, **MercerMedia**, **Museum of Modern Art**, **National Museum of the American Indian**, **New York University Preservation** and **Cinema Studies Departments**, **New York State Council on the Arts**, **Smithsonian Institution Archives** (DC), **Standby Program**, **Tate Gallery** (London), **The Kitchen**, **V Tape** (Toronto), **Video Data Bank** (Chicago) and **WNET**.

Transcripts of the proceedings will be posted on the Experimental Television Center's Video History site www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history later in the Fall. *Looking Back/ Looking Forward* was also documented by Bay Area Video Coalition. With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, BAVC is producing a DVD on videotape preservation. The DVD will include footage of presentations made at *Looking Back/Looking Forward* as well as other recent symposia organized by IMAP and ArtTable. The DVD will feature interviews with leading conservators, curators, media technicians and artists on issues ranging from the latest techniques to ethical issues and viewer experiences. The DVD, to be released in late 2002, will be distributed to museums, libraries, history archives, media arts organizations and colleges throughout the country.

In addition to the transcripts, the Preservation resource area of the Video History Web includes two commissioned papers: *Video Preservation: The Basics* (2000, revised 2002) written by Sherry Miller Hocking and Mona Jimenez, and *Reel to Real: A Case Study of BAVC's Remastering Facility* (2002) written by Luke Hones, and edited by Sherry Miller Hocking and Mona Jimenez. There is also a selection of historically important texts concerning early efforts at media preservation.

The first day of *Looking Back/Looking Forward* was devoted to *Issues in Physical Preservation*, an intensive description and analysis of the remastering process. Led by Luke Hones (Artists Television Access), Heather Weaver, Kacey Koeberer, and Jon Selsley (all of Bay Area Video Coalition) the session followed the process of preservation from the arrival of a tape to its remastering: from inspection, to cleaning, playback, and finally duplication. While focused primarily on 1/2" open reel, among the most endangered of video formats, the panel also explored the impact of the issues raised on other formats and on audio. In a technical discussion, the panelists presented hardware, including the intermediary devices used to monitor, measure, and "correct" the signals, as well as the documentation of the preservation process. *Reel to Real: BAVC's Remastering Model, a Case Study* by Luke Hones, concerning the history and configuration of the Bay Area Video Coalition's remastering facility, provides a detailed look at this topic.

Concluding the first day, *The Economics of Physical Preservation* led by John Thomson of Electronic Arts Intermix, Kate Horsfield of Video Data Bank, and Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak of V Tape presented the realities and difficulties faced by non-profit organizations as they struggle with preservation. What are possible models for getting the job done and what are the real costs? What kinds of problems of access and maintenance do the hardware and devices pose and how can we solve them? What does this discussion of economics tell us about where we need to go from here?

MercerMedia hosted a reception on Friday evening, which allowed participants to meet informally and to familiarize themselves with

the post-production services and media streaming solutions for independent producers provided by MercerMedia and through a collaboration with the **Standby Program**.

Saturday morning opened with *Media Formats Update and Discussion* led by Mona Jimenez (Materia Media) and independent media artist Steina Vasulka. Mona briefly summarized the different points of view in the archival and media arts communities concerning formats. Steina opened the discussion to the range of practical solutions to the remastering question, employing readily available resources. What do archivists and other professionals recommend for a "preservation format"? What are the pros and cons of various formats? How do these recommendations apply in practice to the independent media community?

In *Assessing a Collection for Preservation*, Sarah Stauderman (Smithsonian Institution) introduced a working tool of her own design, the preservation priority worksheet for video tape collections, which seeks to standardize an approach to accessing a collection. It is based on a summary of the questions archivists and conservators typically ask when prioritizing a list of works from a collection for possible remastering. How do cost and complexity of the remastering process impact decisions? In practice, how are works selected for remastering? Are there similar issues when tackling preservation of hardware and tools?

The afternoon session, *Issues in Capturing Related Histories*, was presented by Jean Gagnon of the Daniel Langlois Foundation, Woody Vasulka of Art and Science Laboratory, and Joel Chadabe of the Electronic Music Foundation. A model for the presentation of historical documents on the web, and issues of preservation of performative media were presented. Media preservation must address needs ranging from intermedia performance, and installations and also artists' instruments, tools and paper ephemera, all of which provide a richer context to enhance understanding of the tapes we are trying to save and the history of electronic media art.

The final session of the day concluded with a frank and honest discussion of the next steps, facilitated by Dara Meyers-Lingsley of IMAP and Luke Hones. Among the topics discussed and the actions identified were these:

Focus Topics

Information exchange

-Broaden the conversation to increase learning opportunities and prevent duplication of effort and service

-Share information resources with an international community

-Enrich the presentation of media history and encourage participation by the community

-Preservation of documents and records which provide context for the history

-Collection and dissemination of information held by pioneering artists and groups

-Providing public access to these documents for research purposes

-Economies of scale

-Analysis of existing solutions and identification of additional needs, particularly in areas of remastering and storage

-Creation of stable public/private partnerships

-Identification of range of solutions appropriate to existing resources

-Relationships of exhibition, production and distribution centers to preservation activities

Research

-Support for research directly relevant to electronic moving image preservation

-Outreach to corporate communities with needed resources, expertise and information

-Facilitate better understandings of where archival research is being conducted and published

-Selection strategies for public collection

-Relationships of public to private collections

-Curatorial roles in preservation

Public policy concerns

-Methods of influencing dominant cultural policies to better serve needs of independent media communities

Communication

-Development and transmission of useful and usable information to funders

-Creation of methods to facilitate transfer information from the pioneers to the newer generations of media artists and activists

-Broaden inter-field and intra-field communication avenues

Education

-Identify the different needs and priorities for core constituents, media professionals, funders, and the general public

-Establish historical contexts from which to view preservation work

-Examine standards of ethical practice for moving image works

Actions

-Research best practices internationally

-Expand constituencies

-Develop pilot union catalog

-Preserve early knowledge-base

-Conduct interviews with early pioneers - artists, technicians, inventors

-Identify existing communications pathways and organizations with a stake

Strategies for Implementation and Next Steps

-Small group meetings charged with reporting to larger communities

-Use of web-based forms - email and listservs

-Use of existing organizations and their communications voices and resources

-Internships and mentorships to help educate about the tapes and objects

-Conservation case studies

-De-localization of the problems

-Support for new and existing publications - concerning conservation practices that work; the early historical contexts of media works

-Clearinghouse with centralized access for information

Looking Back/Looking Forward is an activity of the Center's Video History Project, an ongoing web and research initiative begun in 1994 to reflect the complex evolution of the media arts field, and encourage a collective voice in the crafting of our histories.

The goals of the Video History Project are to provide a dynamic vehicle for the creation and dissemination of an inclusive media history, crafted by those who are shaping it; to help establish bridges for intellectual access to information and to position independent media arts activities within a broader cultural context by cultivating research and public programming of these materials by those in the arts, humanities and sciences; and to encourage alliances among collecting institutions and educational and curatorial programs for the preservation of critically endangered works, instruments and documents.

Launched in 2000, the Video History Website continues to serve as a both a research collection and dissemination medium. The site structure depends on nine interrelated resource databases containing a total of about 3500 records. The resource areas concern People, Tools, Groups, Distribution and Preservation. The Bibliography resource area contains over 1000 entries. In the Chronology area you can generate a timeline of events in media arts history, or view the events within a defined range. The search function allows visitors to search all of the records, encouraging the visitor to discover broad interconnections among people, places and events. Each resource area contains historically significant texts, descriptive information and links.

Looking Back Looking Forward was organized by ETC in association with IMAP, BAVC, and the Electronic Media Specialty Group of the AIC (American Institute for the Conservation of Artistic and Historic Works). *Looking Back/Looking Forward* was hosted by DCTV, and made possible with public funds from the Electronic Media and Film Program of the NYS Council on the Arts, and assistance from IMAP, MercerMedia and Dave Jones Design. The symposium was organized by Sherry Miller Hocking, Assistant Director of the Experimental Television Center, and independent consultant Mona Jimenez.

The Video History Project has received support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Statewide Challenge Grant Program, the New York State Council on the Arts, and New York Foundation for the Arts Technology Planning Grants Program, and from the Everson Museum of Art, the Media Action Grant Program of Media Alliance, and the Institute for Electronic Arts at Alfred University. Corporate support has been provided by Blackhammer, Dave Jones Design and VidiPax as well as individual contributors. Partners have included the New York State Alliance for Arts Education, IMAP, BAVC and the Electronic Media Specialty Group of AIC. The Project is under the direction of Sherry Miller Hocking of the Experimental Television Center; independent preservation consultant Mona Jimenez served as major contributor for conference and web planning and for the symposium. David Jones Design implemented the web design, and David serves as webmaster. www.experimentaltvcenter.org

Sherry Miller Hocking *has worked with the Center since 1972. Trained as a teacher, she has taught numerous workshops regarding video and has presented seminars. She is presently on the Electronic Media and Film Program advisory panel at the New York State Council on the Arts, serves on the Advisory Board of the Independent Media Arts Preservation Project, and is program director of the Video History Web.*

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☐ individual	$35/yr
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fall/winter 2002

Workshop Registration Form

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No refunds given after the first class. At least half of total tuition due a week prior to workshop in order to reserve space. If you are not already a Squeaky Wheel member, you automatically become one for a year when you invest in a workshop.

Wanna join Squeaky Wheel or take a workshop? Fill these forms out and send them in!
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Squeaky Wheel/Buffalo Media Resources is an artist run non-profit media arts center founded in 1985 to promote and support film, video, computer, digital, and audio art by media artists and community members. **Squeaky Wheel** offers low-cost access to video and film equipment rental, editing suites, education outreach programs, and screenings and exhibitions of grassroots and avant-garde film and video.

Squeaky Wheel Membership Provides:

- Access to video, film and digital production equipment, editing facilities and digital lab.
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- Access to our Video Library containing 300+ independent videotapes
- Access to Squeaky Wheel's Print Library and periodicals
- Use of Squeaky Wheel as a pass-through for individual grants

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